**Harold Pinter**

Born in London in 1930, Harold Pinter is a renowned playwright and screenwriter. His plays are particularly famous for their use of understatement to convey characters' thoughts and feelings. In 2005, Pinter was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Writer and political activist Harold Pinter is most famous for his plays. Inspired in part by [Samuel Beckett](http://www.biography.com/people/samuel-beckett-9204239), he created his own distinctive style, marked by terse dialogue and meaningful pauses. During World War II, Pinter saw some of the bombing of his city by the Germans. This firsthand experience of war and destruction left a lasting impression on Pinter.He started out as an actor. After studying at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art for a time, he worked in regional theater in the 1950s and sometimes used the stage name David Baron. Pinter wrote a short play, *The Room*, in 1957, and went on to create his first full-length drama, *The Birthday Party*. *The Birthday Party* premiered in London in 1958 to savage reviews, and closed within a week. In 2005, Pinter was honored with the Nobel Prize for Literature

**Major Works**

**1-"Comedies of menace" (1957–1968)**

- [*The Room*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Room_(play)), 1957.

-[*The Birthday Party*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Birthday_Party_(play)), 1957. *The Birthday Party*, one of his best-known works, was initially both a commercial and critical disaster.

-[*The Hothouse*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hothouse), 1958.

- [*The Dumb Waiter*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dumb_Waiter) (1959).

- [*The Caretaker*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Caretaker), 1960, established Pinter's theatrical reputation.

-one-act play [*A Night Out*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Night_Out_(play)), (1960)

*-The Homecoming* (1964)

**\*Why are they called "comedies of menace"?**

The critics called Pinter's early plays "[comedy of menace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comedy_of_menace)"—a label that people have applied repeatedly to his work. Such plays begin with an apparently innocent situation that becomes both threatening and "[absurd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absurdism)" as Pinter's characters behave in ways often perceived as inexplicable by his audiences and one another. Pinter acknowledges the influence of [Samuel Beckett](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Beckett), particularly on his early work; they became friends, sending each other drafts of their works in progress for comments.

**2-"Memory plays" (1968–1982)**

From the late 1960s through the early 1980s, Pinter wrote a series of plays and sketches that explore complex ambiguities, elegiac mysteries, comic vagaries, and other "quicksand-like" characteristics of[memory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memory) and which critics sometimes classify as Pinter's "[memory plays](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memory_play)".

- [*Landscape*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Landscape_(play)) (1968)

- [*Silence*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silence_(play)) (1969)

- [*Night*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Night_(sketch)) (1969),

- [*Old Times*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Times) (1971),

 -[*No Man's Land*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No_Man%27s_Land_(play)) (1975)

*-The Proust Screenplay* (1977)

- [*Betrayal*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Betrayal_(play)) (1978)

- [*Family Voices*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_Voices) (1981)

- [*Victoria Station*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victoria_Station_(play)) (1982)

and [*A Kind of Alaska*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Kind_of_Alaska) (1982)

**3-Overtly political plays and sketches (1980–2000)**

Following a three-year period of creative drought in the early 1980s, Pinter's plays tended to become shorter and more overtly political, serving as critiques of [oppression](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oppression), [torture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torture), and other abuses of [human rights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights), linked by the apparent "invulnerability of power."

- [*One for the Road*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_for_the_Road_(Harold_Pinter_play)) (1984).

 -[*Mountain Language*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mountain_Language) (1988)

- *The New World Order* (1991)

-*Party Time* (1991)

-[*Moonlight*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moonlight_(play)) (1993)

- [*Ashes to Ashes*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashes_to_Ashes_(play))(1996)

- and Pinter's last stage play, [*Celebration*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celebration_(play)) (2000), is a social [satire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satire) .

**Mountain Language**

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:MountainLanguage.JPG)

***Mountain Language*** is a one-act play written by [Harold Pinter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Pinter), first published in 1988. It was first performed at the [Royal National Theatre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_National_Theatre) in London on 20 October 1988. *Mountain Language* lasts about 25 minutes in production.

**Background**

According to a letter from Pinter to [*The Times Literary Supplement*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Times_Literary_Supplement), where it was first published and advertised, that publication's "advertisement . . . stat[ing] that the play was 'inspired' by [Pinter's] trip to [Turkey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkey) with [Arthur Miller](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Miller) and is a '[parable](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parable) about [torture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torture) and the fate of the [Kurdish people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurd)' ... [are] ... assertions ... made without consultation with the author [Pinter]"; he continues: "The first part of the sentence [that it was inspired by Pinter trip to Turkey with Miller] is in fact true. The play is not, however, 'about the fate of the Kurdish people' and, above all it is not intended as a 'parable'." As Grimes points out, "Pinter evidently believes his political plays are too direct to be seen as metaphors or parables" (90). As Pinter insists in that letter, the text has more universal relevance: "this play is not about the Turks and the Kurds. I mean, throughout history, many languages have been banned––the Irish have suffered, the Welsh have suffered and the Urdu and the Estonians' language banned." The dialogue does contain some identifiably contemporary British or Western cultural references, thereby showing its applicability to the Great Britain of the present, but the text of the play contains no explicit geographical place setting and no explicit time setting, rendering its setting in place and time simultaneously indeterminate and thus also broadly relevant.

When *Mountain Language* opened at the National Theatre in London on October 20, 1988, the audience was shocked by the play’s stark look at the machinations and effects of totalitarianism. Employing the characteristic structure and style of his previous plays, Harold Pinter focused on new subject matter. Drawing his inspiration from the long history of oppression the Kurds suffered under Turkish rule, Pinter centered his play in a prison controlled by unnamed guards in an unnamed country. As the Turkish did to the Kurds, the guards ban the prisoners’ native language as they incarcerate them for unnamed crimes against the State. This enigmatic play employs the innovative techniques found in Pinter’s earlier plays, blending absurdism and realism in illustration of the harsh reality of modern society and the individual’s isolated and powerless state within that society.

**Characters**

The play involves four main characters: a Young Woman (Sara Johnson), an Elderly Woman, a Hooded Man (Charley Johnson, husband of the Young Woman) and an unnamed Prisoner (son of the Elderly Woman). These characters are in stark contrast to the Officer, Sergeant and guards of the prison where the Hooded Man and the Prisoner are captives.

**PLOT SUMMARY**

**Scene I: Prison Wall**

The play opens with a line of women standing up against a prison wall. An elderly woman cradles her hand while a young woman stands with her arm around her. A sergeant and an officer enter. The sergeant points to the young woman and asks her her name. The young woman replies that they have given their names. The two repeat this dialogue until the officer tells the sergeant to “stop this s——.”

The officer then turns to the young woman and asks her if she has any complaints. The young woman responds that the older woman has been bitten. When the officer asks the elderly woman who bit her, she slowly raises her hand but remains silent. The young woman tells him that a Doberman pinscher bit her. Again he asks the elderly woman who bit her hand, as if he had never heard the young woman’s reply. The elderly woman stares at him and remains silent. The younger woman, redefining her response, tells him “a big dog.” When the officer asks the dog’s name, he is met with silence, which agitates him to the point that he insists “every dog has a name” given by its parents. He informs them that before dogs bite, they state their name. He then tells the young woman that if the dog bit the elderly woman without stating his name, he will have the dog shot. When he is met again with silence, he barks, “silence and attention.”

The officer then calls the sergeant over and asks him to take any complaints. When the sergeant again asks for complaints, the young woman tells him that they have been standing all day in the snow, while the guards have taunted them with the dogs, one of which bit the woman. The officer again asks the name of the dog. The young woman looks at him and answers, “I don’t know his name.”

The sergeant then abruptly changes the subject, informing the women, “your husbands, your sons, your fathers, these men you have been waiting to see, are s——houses” and “enemies of the State.” The officer steps forward and identifies the women as “mountain people” and tells them that since their language is forbidden, it should be considered “dead.” They are only allowed to speak “the language of the capital.” He warns that they will be “badly punished” if they try to speak the mountain language. He reiterates that this is the law and that their language is dead, and ends by asking whether there are any questions. When the young woman responds that she does not speak mountain language, the sergeant puts his hand on her “bottom” and asks, “What language do you speak with your a——?” When the officer warns the sergeant to remember that the women have committed no crime, the sergeant asks, “but you’re not saying they’re without sin?” The officer admits that was not his point, and the sergeant concludes the young woman is full of sin, that “she bounces with it.”

The young woman then identifies herself by name and tells them she has come to see her husband, which she claims is her right. When she presents her papers, the officer notes that she and her husband do not come from the mountains, and realizes that he has been put “in the wrong batch.” The sergeant concludes, “she looks like a f——intellectual to me.”

**Scene II: Visitor’s Room**

The scene opens with the elderly woman sitting next to a prisoner. When she speaks to him in a rural accent, the guard jabs her with a stick, insisting that the language is forbidden. The prisoner tries to explain to the guard that the woman doesn’t know the language of the capital but is met with silence. When the elderly woman tells the prisoner that she has apples, the guard again jabs her and shouts that her language is forbidden. The prisoner admits that the woman does not know what the guard is saying. The guard refuses to accept responsibility and concludes, “you’re all a pile of s——.” When the prisoner does not respond to the guard’s questions, the guard calls the sergeant and reports, “I’ve got a joker in here.”

The action freezes and, in a voiceover, the audience hears a conversation between the elderly woman and the prisoner, who identifies himself as her son. He voices concern for her bitten hand. She tries to encourage him, telling him that everyone is looking forward to his homecoming. The sergeant then appears, asking “what joker” and the scene abruptly ends.

**Scene III: Voice in the Darkness**

The scene opens in a corridor where a guard and the sergeant are holding up a hooded man. When the sergeant sees the young woman there, he demands to know who let her in. The guard answers that she is the hooded man’s wife. The sergeant first asks whether this is a reception for “Lady Duck Muck” then apologizes to her, saying that there must have been “a bit of a breakdown in administration,” and so she was sent through the wrong door. He then asks if there is anything he can do for her.

The characters freeze again. In a voiceover conversation, the hooded man and his wife, the young woman, speak lovingly about their lives together and imagine they are on a lake holding each other. When the action starts again, the hooded man collapses, and his wife screams, calling him by name. He is then dragged off. The sergeant reiterates that she has come through the wrong door and informs her that if she has any questions, she can ask the “bloke” who comes in “every Tuesday week, except when it rains.” She asks whether “everything [will] be all right” if she has sex with this man, and the sergeant replies “sure. …

**Article excerpt**

With One for the Road (1984) and Mountain Language (Faber, 1988) Harold Pinter experiments with a kind of political drama that confronts the audience with the oppressive and authoritarian operation of state power and the political and cultural dimensions of the battles for it. Pinter deals with insecurity in relation to the subject's status in terms of Foucault's "effect of power and ... the element of articulation" (Power/Knowledge, 1980).In the power game both the dominant and the other, we can find, use the strategy of homogenization and differentiation between them.

In Mountain the coercive power of the language is the ideological state apparatus, to use Louis Althusser's term, which plays a central role in containing the threat of difference. Pinter dramatizes the conflict between centre and margin, the political economy of the same and the resistance of difference by presenting the opposition between the constraining monological language and subversive heteroglossia as a conflict between the officially sanctioned language of the state and the language of the marginalized mountain people.

The play is set in a prison on the day, when women from mountains have been granted permission to visit their incarcerated relations, who have obviously resisted the state authority. They have been potential targets of authority's gaze as part of the system, a way of looking that could operate as a general principle of surveillance. As a part of the disciplinary system an officer announces that they are not allowed to speak in their language to their men, because there is a military decree that their language is outlawed and forbidden, and their language no longer exists. The language of the capital is imposed on mountain people to engineer homogenization or sameness to help the state to consolidate its authority. The physical repressive methods of imprisonment and torture are combined with the ideological coercive methods of one state language formula and elimination of other languages to keep the other under subjugation.

But the desperation and nervousness that their action betrays underscores the precarious positions of those who occupy the subject position of authority. As we find, though homogenization is their strategy of control, ironically they often resort to the strategy of difference, difference from the powerless to maintain their hierarchical superiority, but this difference is to be acceptable within homogeneous cultural political order-that of one central authority and one cultural system. When the young woman, in the beginning, draws the attention of the sergeant to the old woman being bitten by a dog officer wants to know the name of the dog: "Every dog has a name!... Before they bite ,they state their name. It's a formal procedure" (Mountain 17).This underscores the absurdity of officiousness that tries to apply official, bureaucratic procedure to examine a dog's behavior and brings out the contradictions in their power structure. By equating man with dog it also ridicules the common man, the underdog, reduces him to a state beast or subhuman to maintain his superiority and difference, and project his 'humanism'. Young woman's intellectual stance of asserting her right is savagely degraded by sergeant's calling her "a fucking intellectual" (25). …